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Abstract: Over the past decades, Finland has become more international, and the need for academic and professional language skills has increased and shifted towards productive skills. In this paper, I shall provide an overview of this development as seen through course catalogues from four decades, and compare it with real student needs, strengths and weaknesses. The material consists of course descriptions from the 1970s to the present, which are used to trace the evolution and development of English courses taught at the University of Helsinki Language Centre. These were contrasted with 365 CEFR self-assessments my students completed at the beginning of their faculty-specific English courses (*English Academic and Professional Skills*) and another data set consisting of 20 interviews of graduates who have used languages professionally. The results show that the language courses have been developed so that they focus more on productive skills, which the students find demanding but essential for coping academically and professionally. For new teachers developing their English courses, this paper provides a context to be considered in the development process.

Keywords: language needs, course aims, course design, professional English

1 Introduction

The Internet, with faster communication and increased potential for cultural interaction, together with globalized business, have brought people closer together, made information more accessible, and extended the social network of people we interact with. All this has also changed the role of language in professional, academic and everyday contexts, making *lingua franca* English almost a norm required for coping in the modern world. This has gradually

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changed the language needs of our students, what we teach and how we teach it (Lehtonen et al. 2013).

The starting point for this study was the accumulation of various types of data during the past decade reflecting the changing needs of students at the University of Helsinki and the requirements of the faculties. Such data can be utilized at the Language Centre for developing English courses and at the University of Helsinki for revising the curriculum. The accumulated material consists of earlier studies on language needs (e.g. by Karjalainen and Lehtonen 2005; Lehtonen and Karjalainen 2008, 2009), material collected in my courses (by the CEFR grids) and the ongoing Language Centre Project on Professional Language Needs. All these, together with increased public discussion on professional language needs of the future, triggered my interest and functioned as the background for this survey on whether what we teach and how we teach it in the current English courses matches what the students actually need.

This paper begins with a brief discussion of the past development of English courses at the University of Helsinki Language Centre, and then considers to what extent the current English courses match the professional and academic needs reported by former graduates with professional experience (with an older and a new data set), as well as the needs emphasized by representatives of their employers. The language needs of these groups are further contrasted with the varied language needs of the students who have more recently begun their studies at the university. Based on these, I assess the appropriateness of the current aims and approach, and discuss whether they support the actual language needs of students taking faculty-specific English courses at the University of Helsinki Language Centre. Since the needs of the students studying English as a part of their degrees have changed over time, it is important to continue monitoring the change in the future so that we can continuously develop our language courses to match the needs of the students and their future employers.

The outcomes of this survey can help in planning future English courses, developing the curriculum and clarifying the role of language studies in faculty-specific degree requirements, which were revised as a part of a reform of education at the University of Helsinki in 2017. In this sense, the target audience not only consists of English teachers at language centres interested in developing their teaching approaches and considering the tacit assumptions they might have in their teaching philosophy, but also others interested in the evolution and pedagogical underpinnings of English teaching at the University of Helsinki.

2 Data and methods

Methodologically, this survey relies on a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches and utilizes several sources, providing a contextualized view of the evolution of the current language courses.

The qualitative data include a sample of course descriptions representing the curricula of 1977–2016 (providing an overview of the types of English skills taught in the past and to some extent the aims and descriptions of these courses), which we compared with earlier surveys on the language skills of graduates (Horppu 2005) and their professional language needs (Karjalainen and Lehtonen 2005; Lehtonen and Karjalainen 2008, 2009). These were further contrasted with more recent interviews of twenty current professionals with several years of experience (6 males, 14 female; aged from 32 to 67; representing social sciences, humanities, theology, sciences, law and education/behavioral sciences) as part of a current Language Centre Project on Professional Language Needs. Additional comparative data sources were two recent surveys on professional language needs by organizations representing industry (Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) 2014) and student exchange (CIMO; Siivonen 2013).

There are several caveats to be borne in mind: the views of organizations and industry may be biased; the students do not necessarily know the variety of what they will be using their language skills for in the future, and the self-assessments to some extent reflect student personality, confidence and culture. Nevertheless, the results provide a sense of what may partly motivate the students to learn a language. And even though there may also be differences in how familiar the students are in assessing their competence, when the number of these self-assessments becomes high enough, it becomes easier to see how most of the students see their strengths and weaknesses, and thus provide an interesting and important addition to the experience of the teacher and the measurable results based on testing and observations. For this reason, they should be taken into consideration when developing language courses. Also, in faculty-specific language teaching, the faculties need to be consulted in their key areas of research and development to keep up with the most current topics and key issues relevant for language teaching.

The quantitative data contrast the CEFR self-assessments by older graduates (Horppu 2005) and 365 of my recent students who assessed their current language skills at the beginning of faculty-specific *English Academic and Professional Skills* courses (Table 1). The starting level for the courses is B2 (CEFR), the target for good English skills in the matriculation examinations at the end of Finnish high school education. Even though the sample size for this

Table 1: Distribution of majors in the sample of course-initial self-reflections of 365 "current" students.

Faculties or Majors	Students in the sample:	Sample years:
Medicine & Dentistry	142	2013–15
Biosciences (Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences)	99	2008–15
Agriculture (Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry)	93	2010–15
Law	22	2013–14
Chemistry (Faculty of Science)	9	2007
Total	365 students	2007–15

survey is limited, the results match my assessment of their language skills based on the experience I have gathered over the years on their written assignments, presentations and in-class performance.

I believe that combining the views of the students beginning their language courses, the views of those with real professional experience, views of the employers with testing and the experience, and observations of the teachers who collaboratively develop language courses, provides better learning outcomes and higher motivation than relying on teacher views only. Also, as a tool, this approach provides the teacher with a much better idea of how language-specific communicative needs change over time.

3 Historical overview: Teaching of English at the University of Helsinki over the past decades

When established (in 1977–78), the University of Helsinki Language Centre was a relatively small unit and the focus appears to have been on testing and comprehension rather than on productive skills. The four English teachers at the time taught practical and generic skills courses helping the students, for example, to understand and learn from scientific texts written in English. A year later, the coverage was extended to practical discussion courses and oral skills. In the late 1970s, this matched the language needs of our students relatively well. Finland was a remote corner of Europe, culturally more isolated than today. However, the world globalized in a relatively short period of time, requiring better, wider language skills. Knowing what the others said or wrote was no

longer enough. The gradually increasing numbers of vacations spent abroad and other international connections required productive and interactive language skills. As Norris (1997: 36) remembers, at this point the courses completed at school before entering the university had also changed. They allowed (and perhaps required) more active participation.

A decade later, the division continued (Table 2), with the earlier courses on reading comprehension being taught by non-native English teachers with native-like English proficiency, and oral skills being taught by English-speaking natives. According to Norris (1997: 36), the need for high-level writing skills especially increased in the late 1990s, and Finnish doctors, vets and dentists began treating more foreign patients and met more visiting colleagues than in the past. By the turn of the millennium, most graduates fulfilled their foreign language studies as part of their degree requirements in English (Lehtonen and Karjalainen 2008: 494), and some university content courses were also taught in English. Finland became a member state of the European Union in 1995, and perhaps in the minds of the population was no longer isolated from the rest of Europe or the world. However, even though the new political, commercial and cultural interaction would have required more sophisticated communicative skills in several languages, especially European ones, most students focused on developing their English skills, and this trend seems to have continued.

In the mid-1990s, the main pedagogical change was the introduction of new, optional English courses taught as Autonomous Learning Modules (ALMS; Karlsson et al. 1997). These courses were more student-oriented and provided a more flexible approach to language learning. This approach also better supported students whose needs differed from others. For most of the teacher-led courses, the earlier division into reading comprehension and oral skills remained (Helsinki University Language Centre, 1977–2016).

In 2004, the Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004) required language skills in both domestic languages and in at least one foreign language. This revised decree introduced an emphasis on the international aspect (Lehtonen and Karjalainen 2009: 413), and for the foreign language, emphasized the development of skills required for following the international developments in one's field of study and for acting in international environments. At the beginning of the new millennium, the Language Centre still arranged separate language tests and courses for reading comprehension and oral skills, both specified in the degree diplomas in the past, but further optional courses on more specific language skills were introduced. The students could now extend and develop their English language skills by selecting dedicated courses on specific skills including courses called *Academic and Professional English Skills, Conference English, Cross-cultural Communication, Oral Presentations,*

Table 2: Helsinki University Study Guides: Key information in the descriptions of the English courses in 1977–2016.

YEAR of the study guide	ENGLISH COURSES AVAILABLE:	COMMENTS:
1977–78	*Pro Exercitio* exams	(4 teachers)
(The 1st guide to the students))	Reading Comprehension Tests Courses on reading comprehension (understanding scientific texts written in English), remedial reading comprehension, general courses, practical English	Focus on reading comprehension, not production!
1978–79	A new language course on practical English and practical discussion courses, oral skills	New extension to oral skills and discussions
1982–83	Reading comprehension (taught in Finnish as a meta-language)	Division into Reading Comprehension taught by non-natives and Oral Skills taught by natives
1988–89		
1990–91	Oral skills (taught in English by the native speakers)	
(1995)	(The new ALMS courses begin)	Teachers no longer clearly divided by natives and non-natives.
2002–03	Exemption tests for reading comprehension and oral skills. In addition to the earlier courses, new extension module consisting of Academic and Professional English Skills, Conference English, Cross-Cultural Communication, Oral Presentations, Academic Discussions, EU Terminology, Preparatory courses for students going abroad, Academic Writing, Writing for Career purposes, seminar skills, thesis writing, scientific writing, critical reading and writing,...	Wider variety of skills taught becomes available More approaches to learning (ALMS) New possibilities for extensions and developing specific skills
2015–16	Faculty-specific EAPS courses and ALMS Exemption tests (new portfolio testing) A wide variety of Advanced-level EAPS courses, including Academic Writing, Presentation Skills AW for international Ma programmes Consultation sessions for extending AW (99107) Peer feedback groups	(20 or so teachers, some with a doctoral degree) Faculty-specific EAPS-courses (English Academic and Professional Skills) and a wide variety of advanced-level courses on specific skills, academic writing courses specifically tailor made for the international programmes (language support), additional support, consultations, etc. All English courses taught in English. Focus on a wider variety of skills, both academic and professional, productive skills have become more essential, both written and spoken.

ALMS = Autonomous Learning ModuleS ; EAPS = English Academic and Professional Skills.

Academic Discussions, EU Terminology, Academic Writing, Writing for Career Purposes, Seminar Skills, Thesis Writing, Scientific Writing, Critical Reading and Writing. These titles reveal a clear need for productive skills, especially writing in English. Moreover, the students had become even more international, as indicated by the new preparatory course for students going abroad. These changes reflected the change in the role of English. Finland had become an open and dynamic part of the world, with people travelling and actively relying on their language skills. At this point, English had become essential as the primary means of international communication, even though it was still possible for students to study another foreign language as part of their degrees. Both domestic languages, Finnish and Swedish, remained in the degree requirements, except in the international, mainly English-medium Master's degree programmes, which gradually became more popular, also increasing the number of foreign students at the University of Helsinki.

Since the turn of the millennium, the Language Centre has taught faculty-specific and to some extent discipline-specific English academic and professional skills, arranged and discussed in annual meetings between the faculties and the Language Centre. Students can choose between teacher-led sessions, autonomous learning modules (ALMS) (Bradley et al. 2016), an exemption test (as a portfolio test) (Amendolara et al. 2013) or have their earlier English studies or skills acquired by other means accredited to fulfill the degree language requirements. These requirements are specified by the faculties, and there is some variety, for example, in the numbers of credits required for the foreign and the domestic languages. In addition to the current basic requirements, a wide variety of advanced-level courses are offered, including academic writing, presentation skills and intercultural communication. The English-medium Master's programmes have tailor-made language support in academic writing, and more individual guidance and support is available. There are new student groups for peer feedback to support academic writing and a possibility to develop and maintain language skills in pairs with a native-speaker of another language. The number of students and teachers participating in international exchange, especially within the Erasmus program, has increased, and the university has an explicit language policy (University of Helsinki 2007b, 2014) specifying that the university has to some extent become trilingual (Finnish, Swedish and English). Currently, the English unit is among the largest language teaching units at the Language Centre, and the number of teachers with doctoral degrees has gradually increased, furthering interest in research and development and gradually increasing the number of various collaborative development projects at the Language Centre.

It is interesting how the development presented in Table 2 follows more general trends and developments in language teaching in Finland. As Table 3 shows, language was seen as a structured code in the 1970s, best taught through grammar and translations. This changed in the 1980s so that the focus moved from teaching to learning. Language was perceived as a tool and a skill, and the approaches were based on more pragmatic, functional language skills and communicative strategies. Various drills and the use of technology in the form of language labs became popular.

Table 3: The approaches and concepts for teaching English match with some more general trends

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Language	teaching subject; language as a code	tool; skill	subject of skill, knowledge and culture; empowering mediator; intelligent partner	
Language Skills	knowledge of language; grammatical language skills	pragmatic, functional language skill, communicative strategies	communicative language skills	Intercultural communicative competence (ICC); media literacy; a basic skill for people
Language Didactic Focus	TEACHING – learning	teaching – LEARNING	TEACHING – STUDYING – LEARNING	
Language Teaching	grammar & translation method	"Closed" methods (audiolingualism, drills, etc.)	communicative; critical, eclectic approach; language education and awareness (language dimension in all subjects; language competence)	

Source: Translated from Wallinheimo 2016 (Orig. compiled from Harjanne 2006: 72: Harjanne and Tella 2010, 2012).

Since the 1990s, language teaching has moved towards communicative language skills. Cultural knowledge and language awareness have become more important, together with intercultural communicative competence and media literacy. The language didactic focus is on the process as a whole, including teaching, studying and learning. The language dimension and competence have become more relevant in all subjects, and high-level English language skills have become a basic professional and academic survival skill. Language labs have been replaced by electronic learning platforms (such as Moodle) used by

personal hand-held devices (iPads, smart phones, laptops) providing much wider access to authentic materials outside the classroom (Wallinheimo and Pitkänen 2016).

Tables 2 and 3 illustrate that the language skills required and the needs perceived are dynamic and depend on the social and cultural context that pedagogical choices serve. During the past decades, the role of professional English language skills, in particular, has increased in Finland, and language teaching focuses more on active language use, preferably with authentic materials, in communicative contexts imitating real needs. It has moved from a combination of grammar and terminology through translation to discipline-specific interaction and communication. This, however, does not mean that precision or style have become irrelevant. Rather, the goals have widened and the requirements have become more demanding.

Changes in the teaching of English appear to follow the more general trends in teaching languages in general, i.e. the development of pedagogics. This is further supported and linked to changes in the trends of linguistics and philology. In these, there has also been a gradual expansion from structure (syntax, morphology, phonology) to function and interaction (e.g. pragmatics, discourse analysis): first in linguistic research (for the history of linguistics in the Nordic countries, see e.g. Hovdhaugen et al. 2000), then in teaching.

4 Professional language needs

Language needs and the skills taught and required have changed over time in tandem with various changes in business and society. Cultural and linguistic preferences have also gradually changed, favoring English more than in the past. Modern hobbies (travels, literature, movies, and computer games) require high-level English skills, but there is also a higher social pressure to become fluent in English. This can be seen in self-assessments of the language skills people tend to have, especially in English.

At the beginning of the millennium, Horppu (2005) became interested in the language skills of university graduates after having gained professional experience based on self-assessments. Table 4 presents a compilation of these professional language skills in English by the former university graduates, who graduated in 1999 and responded to Horppu's postal survey (structured questionnaire) in 2004.

Horppu's questionnaire focusing on quantitative data consisted of five pages of background questions and detailed can-do descriptors specifying skills and

Table 4: Distribution of the professional language skills of older students with completed academic degrees based on self-assessments. The highest percentages of self-assessments in each category are marked with bold.

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
LISTENING professional context	1%	2%	6%	**22%**	**34%**	**36%**
LISTENING lecture/presentation	1%	1%	7%	**28%**	**28%**	**36%**
GUIDANCE of customers, patients, etc.	1%	1%	10%	19%	**30%**	**40%**
ORAL PRESENTATION	1%	4%	**21%**	**26%**	**20%**	**29%**
DISCUSSION meetings/negotiations	2%	4%	16%	**28%**	**34%**	16%
DISCUSSION informal	1%	3%	15%	19%	**31%**	**31**%
READING short messages	-	1%	5%	16%	**78%**	
READING demanding, professional	1%	3%	5%	11%	**43%**	**37%**
WRITING short notes/messages	1%	3%	10%	**24%**	**33%**	**30%**
WRITING more demanding texts	8%		12%	17%	**23%**	**40%**

Compiled from Horppu 2005 (Students graduated in 1999, interviewed in 2004. Data: 974 with an MA-level degree, 216 with a doctoral degree).

needs the graduates had after gaining professional experience. The focus was on how the graduates maintained and developed their language skills, the nature of their professional environment, whether they matched with their education, how frequently they used foreign languages, attitudes related to this, examples of their professional language use. The skills the graduates assessed included all the key communicative skills (understanding spoken language, lectures and presentations; guiding customers, patients and students; giving a speech or presentation; meetings and negotiations; chatting with colleagues; understanding and producing various types of professional texts) and the graduates chose the best descriptors describing their skill. All these also had the CEFR grade marked to the descriptors. They were also asked to specify the languages where they would have needed more support and to specify language areas for further development.

These results were further expanded by employer interviews focusing on, for example, recruitment policies, how the employees coped with the languages

professionally, and how they saw the future of language needs in their professional context. In these, Karjalainen and Lehtonen (2005) focused on more qualitative aspects of the professional communicative needs.

Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2009: 412) note that at the turn of the millennium, these graduates already felt that foreign language skill were needed *and* that they possessed the skills required by their professions.

Even though Horppu's (2005) results suggest high English skills among the graduates, there was some heterogeneity possibly caused by their foreign language choices while studying. In the past, English was not the obvious choice for the first foreign language, as it is today. Depending on the school (and area), there were varying possibilities for choosing the languages. If they chose a language other than English, they may have had problems in reaching the level of the students who had chosen English earlier, and which then later practically became a tacit norm. It is, however, still possible to choose another language, but this is rare. According to Pöyhönen and Luukka (2007, Appendix 10, p. 510), in 2006, 99.5 % of all students who completed high school in Finland chose English as their first foreign language. The majority (92.5 %) spoke Finnish and had Swedish as the other domestic language required for matriculation at that time. For all the other languages, these percentages were much lower: German 35.4 %, French 19.7 %, Spanish 10.3 %, and for other languages the percentages were even lower, less than 10 %. However, as Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2009: 413) discovered in their survey, even though the number of languages studied in secondary education have decreased, employers and workplaces need greater variety in the language palette of their employees. For employees, language skills are important for both recruitment and potential promotions (Lehtonen and Karjalainen 2009: 415).

Based on Horppu's results (Table 4), the graduates appear to be relatively confident with most of the skills surveyed. In general, the majority assessed their language skills in listening, reading, writing, providing guidance to be on levels C1–C2, and even for live productive situations such as oral presentations and discussions demanding better confidence, the levels were relatively high. These figures suggest frequent and active language use, as Lehtonen & Karjalainen (2008: 494) note, with further development and maintenance of language skills after completing the degrees. The reported problems were mainly in oral and written communication and negotiations. In certain productive areas (discussions, oral presentations, listening lectures and presentations), some felt their language skills were clearly below this level, creating some heterogeneity in the sample. For example, in writing more demanding texts, more than a third of the respondents felt their skills were on levels A1–B2. However, even here, almost two-thirds felt their skills were above level C1.

Employers also require good language skills. According to Lehtonen and Karjalainen (2008: 497), the indicators of this for them included " ... good communication and presentation skills, confidence to use a foreign language, and the ability to interact and adapt to various linguistic and cultural conditions." They also note (p. 499) that at least in Southern Finland, people work in demanding plurilingual workplaces. Today, this would probably be a valid claim for most parts of Finland, at least in larger cities.

In another more recent data set based on interviews at the Language Centre in 2015 (Language Centre Project on Professional Language Needs), the role of professional English has further strengthened, in some cases as an official internal language of the company. Functional, relatively high-quality *lingua franca* English has become a basic skill and requirement generally taken for granted. It is widely used for a variety of communicative functions – even among Finns in some situations. Based on this study, people actively use professional English in various forms of interaction (including conferences, presentations, negotiations, guidance, phone calls, videos, seminars, various types of social interaction) and especially for reading (e.g. source materials, news, books) and writing (memos, emails, agreements, decisions, recommendations, materials, documentation). This sample supports the earlier studies by Karjalainen and Lehtonen (2005, 2008, and 2009). Since English has also become the language of entertainment, international media and the Internet, and since the current professional domains where English is used as a *lingua franca* have such a wide coverage, it could be claimed that English is actually the second or third language required in modern Finland. This also reflects the current role it has as the academic language choice at the university, as indicated by the university strategies (e.g. University of Helsinki 2007a, 2016) and language policies (University of Helsinki 2007b, 2014).

Even though English is actively used in a wide range of domains, the comments in the recent survey also revealed some clear remaining needs for further language development. These needs include more cultural knowledge, suggesting real, active intercultural communicative situations, better writing skills, and better knowledge of discipline-specific jargon and technical terminology (e.g. law) (both skills developed at work), but also improved fluency, better skills for interaction (both with native and non-native speakers of English), and better presentation and communication skills, especially argumentation skills. All these needs reflect the gradual change from being able to read and understand to a much more active context of language **use** and more active role of the language **user**.

Additional support for these claims comes from the employer perspective, from the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) (Confederation of Finnish

Industries 2014) and the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO: Siivonen 2013). According to EK, the modern globalized business environment has made work more international. In this environment, language skills are important but not necessarily taken into account enough in recruitment processes. Companies clearly benefit from language skills, but the language palette should be wider, including languages other than English. There is also a need to further strengthen interactive communicative skills, which was not the focus of language courses some decades ago. Siivonen (2013) also notes that the professional environment has become more globalized, making communicative and collaborative skills important in recruitment. He notes that there are several paths for improved language skills, and formal language courses are just one of the approaches people may rely on. In particular, travel, media and entertainment have widened the resources people rely on in language learning. Naturally, learning languages outside the classroom has also been considered in the context of academic language teaching (e.g. Pitkänen et al. 2011a).

5 Skills and needs of the first-year students at the University of Helsinki in 2016

At the beginning of the *English Academic and Professional Skills* courses I teach at the University of Helsinki Language Centre, the students are asked to assess their own language skills according to a CEFR grid (Council of Europe 2001: 26–27) simply by marking the box of the general CEFR descriptors (see Appendix) best representing their language skills in understanding (listening and reading), speaking (interaction and production) and writing. I then collected the forms and compiled the information into a single sheet so that the students could compare their language levels to the others in the group.

The assumed starting level for the course is B2 and at the time of compiling the data C1 was the threshold level for passing the exemption test. (Later, this was changed to B2.2.) Both of these were marked on the forms (by a circle around B2 and C1, together with an oral explanation). Students who had passed the exemption test were not required to take the course and thus the distribution only reveals the variety in the levels for those who were in these groups. However, most student take the course rather than the exemption test, which is currently based on a portfolio format (Amendolara et al. 2013).

Pedagogically, the point was to show the often self-critical students among the group that there is some variety in the language skills of the group, but they tend not to be dramatically different from the rest of the group. Thus, these data

were not originally meant to be a part of a study, and the information can only be used for indicating a more general trend. This trend, however, appears to match my own personal impression of their language skills relatively well, and indicates that most of the students do have the skills to assess their communicative skills in a foreign language. Tables 5 and 6 summarize the self-assessed CEFR levels of the students who have taken my courses.

Table 5: Course-initial self-assessments of English skills by the first-year Bachelor-level students based on a CEFR grid compiled in 2016. The highest percentages of self-assessments in each category are marked with bold. Sample size: 365 students representing several majors and faculties.

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	Total	Additional boxes marked
Understanding	Listening	1	5	36	**150**	**152**	38	382	+17
	Reading	–	2	30	**203**	**117**	26	378	+13
Speaking	Interaction	3	21	**102**	**194**	61	6	387	+22
	Production	3	26	**129**	**173**	39	6	376	+11
Writing		2	11	**93**	**207**	60	9	382	+17
Sample size: 365 students/All									

In general, Table 5 indicates that the students feel they have relatively good skills, around CEFR level B2, which is also the starting level for our courses and the target level at the completion of high school. Moreover, the students do not differ dramatically. Most of the students beginning their tertiary level degrees have relatively similar language backgrounds when they enter the university. In the matriculation exams at the end of high school, the aim for English language skills is to achieve level B2 (CEFR). At this point, pupils have been at school for 12 years and have typically studied English for 9 years, the focus having mainly been on writing, listening and reading. Even though speaking skills have been excluded in the matriculation tests, the students already practice discussions in high school.

Table 5 demonstrates that the students feel their productive skills are at a lower level than their receptive skills, which is to be expected. In general, the levels specified by the students for their understanding are around B2–C1, and are slightly higher in reading than listening (which is simply what they do more). This is in line with the teacher perception and the focus of our more recent English courses. The special area for development for many appears to be spoken production, a skill they do not all frequently practice outside the classrooms.

Table 6: Self-assessments of the current Bachelor-level students, per faculty.

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	Total	+
Understanding	Listening	MD: 0	MD: 1	MD: 15	**MD: 40**	**MD: 65**	**MD: 22**	MD:143	+1
		BS: 1	BS: 0	BS: 7	**BS: 47**	**BS: 42**	**BS: 10**	BS:107	+8
		A: 0	A: 4	**A: 13**	**A:50**	**A: 29**	A: 3	A:99	+6
		L: 0	L: 0	L: 1	**L: 7**	**L: 12**	L: 3	L:23	+1
		C: 0	C: 0	C: 0	**C: 6**	C: 4	C: 0	C:10	+1
	Reading	MD: 0	MD: 0	MD: 8	**MD: 63**	**MD: 54**	**MD: 17**	MD:142	0
		BS: 0	BS: 0	BS: 2	**BS: 58**	**BS: 39**	BS: 5	BS:104	+5
		A: 0	A: 2	**A: 19**	**A: 63**	A: 15	A: 0	A:99	+6
		L: 0	L: 0	L: 0	L: 13	L: 7	L: 3	L:23	+1
		C: 0	C: 0	C: 1	C: 6	C: 2	C: 1	C:10	+1
Speaking	Interaction	MD: 1	MD: 7	**MD: 29**	**MD: 77**	**MD: 28**	MD: 2	MD:144	+2
		BS: 0	BS: 3	**BS: 24**	**BS: 59**	**BS: 21**	BS: 4	BS:111	+12
		A: 2	A: 11	**A: 41**	**A: 38**	A: 7	A: 0	A:99	+6
		L: 0	L: 0	L: 4	**L: 14**	L: 4	L: 0	L:22	0
		C: 0	C: 0	C: 4	**C: 6**	C: 1	C: 0	C:11	+2
	Production	MD: 1	MD: 10	**MD: 42**	**MD: 65**	MD: 21	MD: 3	MD:142	0
		BS: 0	BS: 4	**BS: 31**	**BS: 57**	BS: 10	BS: 2	BS:104	+5
		A: 2	A: 12	**A: 45**	**A: 33**	A: 5	A: 0	A:97	+4
		L: 0	L: 0	L: 6	**L: 13**	L: 2	L: 1	L:22	0
		C: 0	C: 0	**C: 5**	**C: 5**	C: 1	C: 0	C:11	+2
Writing		MD: 0	MD: 3	MD: 19	**MD: 82**	**MD: 36**	MD: 3	MD:143	+1
		BS: 0	BS: 2	**BS: 27**	**BS: 58**	BS: 16	BS: 4	BS:107	+8
		A: 2	A: 6	**A: 41**	**A: 47**	A: 2	A: 0	A:98	+5
		L: 0	L: 0	L: 2	**L: 15**	L: 5	L: 1	L:23	+1
		C: 0	C: 0	**C: 4**	**C: 5**	C: 1	C: 1	C:11	+2

Sample size: 365 students/Distribution by majors or faculties

MD = Medicine & Dentistry, BS = Biosciences, A = Agriculture, L = Law, C = ChemistryThe bold marks the highest numbers; the column marked with + shows the number of students who selected additional adjoining level in the grid, i.e. who were not sure which one of the two to mark, and marked both.

Based on Table 6, even though the language skills of the students studying at the University of Helsinki are relatively similar, there are some differences in the language skills among students beginning their studies in different faculties or disciplines, just as there are differences in the level of all the other skills required to be able to enter the university.

The discipline and faculty-specific differences in the language skills of the students in the sample based on the CEFR self-assessments are presented in Table 6. The choice of their levels for specific language skills shows that there are more individuals selecting higher levels, especially in understanding and

writing, in medicine and biosciences, the former degree program being extremely difficult to enter based on the difficulty of the entrance exam and the high minimum level of points required for reaching the quota. At the same time, there are more individuals among the students of agriculture and chemistry who selected lower levels for their productive skills, i.e. speaking and writing.

The current entrance system is based on two parts. There is a specific quota for the maximum number of students accepted to a faculty, and a new quota for newcomers without earlier rights to study at a university. In general, students are accepted based on the number of combined points from both the matriculation exam and the university entrance exam. Thus, the higher the percentage in Table 7, the more difficult it has been for the student to enter the university and the higher the combination of the points must have been. For example, entering the Faculty of Medicine required higher combined points than the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry. Table 6 shows that there are to some extent the same types of differences in the general profiles of the levels the students have assessed for their language skills. In order to enter the Faculty of Medicine, having high points in the entrance exam is not enough. All the points based on the matriculation exam have to be high, and languages are among the subjects examined in the matriculation test. Thus, indirectly, it may influence the selection of students who begin their studies in the faculty.

Table 7: Percentages of students accepted for their *first* tertiary level degrees in 2015 at the University of Helsinki in the faculties listed in Table 6. (Based on Opintopolku, University of Helsinki 2015)

Faculty	Percentage of new students accepted
Medicine and Dentistry	69%
Biosciences/Environmental Sciences	85%
Agriculture and Forestry	78%
Law	85%
Science	76%
All faculties	**77%**

The differences in the discipline-specific percentages of applicants who filled the quota for new students (Table 7) through the entrance exams and the minimum numbers of starting points based on their high school diplomas vary, causing some differences in how high the grades have to be to enter the university. In some disciplines, like medicine, the applicants need higher

starting points in all the school subjects taken into account, simply because so many of the applicants tend to achieve high starting points also in the entrance exam itself. In some other disciplines, the number of combined points is lower, and the applicants do not have to get high marks for everything, including languages. Naturally, there are also differences in the approaches faculties prefer for teaching and how students study in these faculties. Since students know this, it may influence their choices when applying to the university.

The percentage of students accepted (Table 7 for 2015) is relatively high in the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry, clearly higher than in the Faculty of Medicine, meaning it is much more difficult for the students to enter medical faculties. High school students in general seem to be aware how difficult it is to be accepted to study medicine, which in itself excludes the weaker students from applying. Chemistry students, who here also included more individuals choosing lower levels, differ from the other students in the Faculty of Science and other faculties in that it is possible for them to bypass the entrance examination just by having the best grades in science-related subjects when taking the matriculation test. Thus, the applicants who pass the entrance exam in faculties with a high threshold are usually also good at languages.

6 Our response to the language needs of the current students

What, then, is our response to what we see as the current language needs of our students? The course description in Table 8, containing explicit aims and contents for the current (2016–17) *English Academic and Professional Skills* (99501), provides a good example of this.

The verbs used in Table 8 demonstrate a wide selection of special areas covered, including the key areas specified in the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe 2001). The contents confirm that the course is also tailored to the specific needs of the students of this specific faculty. There is a clear emphasis on long-term continuous development and (which is not explicitly stated) taking individual needs into consideration through the feedback the students are given on their assignments, both from their peers and the teacher.

The implementation of the courses is based on the flipped classroom, so that the students have access to the materials, including texts and videos, in advance via Moodle. Moreover, the students appear to rely on modern technology such as

Table 8: AIMS AND CONTENTS of a course as an example (*99501Biot English Academic and Professional Needs* for the students in the Faculty of Biosciences and Environmental Sciences)

AIMS	CONTENT
The aim of the course is for students to activate and develop skills in the academic and professional English of their field and to gain confidence to communicate in situations relevant to their studies and professional life. The intention is that students improve their ability to	Depending on the particular needs of the group, the course will include – field-specific materials from a range of sources such as journals, (text) books, and the Internet, provided by students and the teacher
– **understand** general and academic/professional spoken English	– **reading** the material, applying appropriate strategies
– **discuss/present** in academic/professional English	– **writing** texts relevant to the students' academic and professional needs
– **understand** academic/professional English texts	– **presenting** and **discussing** topics related to the fields of study
– **write** academic/professional English texts on field-specific topics	– **becoming familiar** with strategies and tools for future language development
– **take responsibility** for their own learning, and become more autonomous language learners, in order to promote life-long learning	

smart phones or iPads to access the materials in class. In some faculties, such as the Faculty of Medicine, these iPads are provided by the university (Wallinheimo and Pitkänen 2016). So, for discussions, students in faculties like this can prepare their participation by reading the articles and other texts, watching videos or listening to podcasts in advance, and then in the classroom discuss or solve problems in groups. For the written tasks, both Moodle and classroom time can be used for peer feedback. Typically, the written tasks are cumulative, one task leading to another, e.g. abstract leading to a presentation, a review to the introduction, the presentation to an essay. In the English courses for biosciences, my students write abstracts and reviews before their oral presentations and then afterwards turn their presentations into articles, just as researchers participating in conferences. Feedback is layered so that for the first draft, they give and receive feedback from the other students in small groups, then rewrite and submit the texts to the teacher, who then provides individual feedback profiling their future language needs through discussions with the students at the end of the course.

In general, the results of this study support the idea that to develop the quality of the courses, we should not only use recently published academic and professional texts where the choice of genre matches the level specified for the

course. The focus should also be on developing what the students feel least confident with, i.e. productive skills (speaking, interaction, group discussions, presentation and writing) supported by the skills they feel more confident with (i.e. reading and listening). It is also essential to integrate as much feedback in various forms as possible to the course structure, including both peer and teacher feedback to the students, for improving confidence and clarifying future needs for further development. Often, the students feel this feedback was the most beneficial and valuable component of the course.

Currently, there is also more variety than before in the approaches and the types of courses (EAPS, ALMS, exemption tests), including several advanced-level courses (e.g. Academic Writing) available for the students. Academic language needs are carefully considered by offering dedicated skills, for instance, in academic writing, presentation skills, and debates, tailor-made to match the discipline-specific contents. Moreover, professional language needs are considered more carefully than in the past by providing faculty-specific teaching, where the dedicated professional needs (e.g. in dentistry, pharmacy, veterinary medicine) can be developed. Cultural issues are also part of the language courses and available as special advanced-level options.

7 Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, I have discussed the evolution and functionality of the current faculty-specific English courses taught at the University of Helsinki Language Centre. I have considered to what extent the current English courses match with the professional and academic needs of our former graduates and the current students, contrasted with the opinions presented by employers. I have also described the current approach and the evolution and changes that have led to this. Methodologically, this survey relied on a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches and utilized several sources, providing a contextualized view on the issue.

I have shown that the language and communication needs of the students should be seen as dynamic rather than static, and we have developed our courses so that they both support the current needs and have followed the more general trends of development in culture, society, language studies and language teaching. Over time, the cultural, social, academic and professional context of language use and communication have radically changed, and we have developed the courses accordingly. The most important change has been in the role and use of English as a *lingua franca*. High-level language and

communication skills have become a basic requirement and English has taken over the domestic languages in several professional domains, requiring flexible and practical communicative skills in various modes and situations. We have moved from understanding the point of a text, and academic mastering of the key grammar and lexicon to multi-situational, multimodal everyday professional interaction, where the communicative requirements are almost as high as they are for the speakers' first native languages. Based on this multi-layered survey, the English courses taught at the Language Centre have supported the skills the future employees need in their academic and professional lives, and the graduates in general both feel confident and continue developing their English skills. Over the past decades, the courses have become more student-centered and the learning environment has evolved together with the technology available to both the teachers and the students.

Even though it is the teacher who develops her or his courses, the occasionally seen teacher-knows-best attitude is not good enough for developing courses for academic and professional English. In addition to the teacher's valuable experience and intuition, supported by first-hand support from testing and observing the students and revising their papers, it is essential to know what the students themselves feel their needs, strengths and weaknesses are both as a student and a graduate already implementing and further developing the language skills acquired earlier. It is also important to investigate what the employers feel are the essential communicative skills and how they are taken into consideration when recruiting new people, for example. If the student views are ignored, it shows in their level of motivation, and the teachers might miss something important about the ongoing change in the surrounding society.

And future needs will certainly differ from those we see as central today. Even now we know that the context in which we teach English language courses will change with the on-going curriculum and degree revision at the University. Communication technology also has a more important role already than it did in the past. In the Faculty of Medicine, all the students use a combination of iPads and the Moodle platform (Wallinheimo and Pitkänen 2016) for both their content and language studies, and will continue using these as part of their interaction with future patients. In general, our courses are continuously developed and teaching skills are maintained through in-house pedagogical training, and course development is based on collaboration (Lehtonen et al. 2015). The LC actively supports research and teaching development, which has increased the number of on-going development projects, and there are currently several specific focus areas for development at the unit, including academic writing (e.g. Pitkänen et al. 2009), especially in the new English-medium Master's degree programmes (Pitkänen et al. 2013; Pitkänen et al. 2011b; Lehtonen et al.

2009), out-of-classroom language learning (Pitkänen et al. 2011a) and providing alternative means for completing the language requirement in the degree (Siddall and Pitkänen 2011), the use of modern technology (Wallinheimo and Pitkänen 2016), and autonomous learning approach (e.g. Karlsson and Kjisik 2011; Bradley et al. 2016), just to name a few. There is also a greater focus on advising and counseling than before (Lehtonen et al. 2016).

So, ongoing changes in academia, the professional language environments and the world around us are likely to require new transferable language and communication skills for new types of communicative situations. We, the language teachers, just need to have an occasional look at where we are coming from and heading to in our language teaching so that in the future it will continue to match the real needs of our students.

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